Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 11 Number 7 September 2014

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 21st September 2014: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Located on the Vijayawada highway, the Park was started as a sanctuary for the endangered Black Buck, but it now houses considerable numbers of Cheetal. Besides, the Park usually yields good numbers of small woodland birds, ground birds like Partridges and Stone Curlew and, perhaps, even a Nightjar. Short-toed Snake Eagles are known to have nested in this park earlier. Also, with the nearby garbage yard having been relocated, there may be an improvement in the variety of bird life. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Dr M Ananda Kumar, Wildlife Biologist, on 'The Anamalais – People and Elephants in a Boiling Kettle'.
Tuesday, 2nd September 2014, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Dr Kumar works with a team of dedicated conservation scientists on the Anamalai Elephant Programme of the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore. Prior to this assignment, he has carried out research work on various other species – primates like the Slender Loris, large mammals like the Asian Elephant, the Nilgiri Tahr, etc. In his talk, Dr Kumar will enlighten us on various aspects of human-elephant interactions, and the innovative efforts to mitigate human-elephant conflict and promote their coexistence.

Trip Report – Nehru Zoological Park, 24th August 2014

Humayun Taher

Common Kingfisher (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

Visits to the Nehru Zoological Park are always interesting. The site has a mixture of three different habitats, with species unique to each. And enjoying a modicum of security and protection, it tends to throw out interesting species from time to time. This time was no different, and we had a considerable number by the time we finished.

Permissions having been obtained, members gathered at the gate by 6.30 a.m. and started catching up on the latest. The hot topic was the just restarted evening birding and we could hear some of the members who had not participated expressing their interest at joining future outings and their disappointment at having missed the inaugural session, as it were.

Having got the group into order, Surekha herded us all into the park and we started along the trail, being welcomed at the entrance by a magnificently plumaged Indian Peacock in full-train.

House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) and Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) were the first to greet us; both species being found here in considerable numbers. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) populations seem to have increased and we kept encountering them throughout the trip. At the end of the trip, my count showed 43 individuals, but some of these could be dual-counts, because I wasn't really doing dedicated counting. A solitary Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) or the Lesser Goldenback, (OK, Black-rumped Flameback then…) knocked away on the trunk of a nearby borassus palm.

Coppersmith Barbet (Photo: Eva Veroeveren)

Coppersmith Barbets (*Megalaima haemacephala*) were adding their own knockings and the bulbuls and mynas put in their mite as well. We continued walking along, while observing the antics of some of the monkeys; one baboon in particular engaged in a solitary game of catch was most entertaining. I suppose it is inevitable that when we visit the Zoo, we tend to take in a considerable number of the caged animals too.

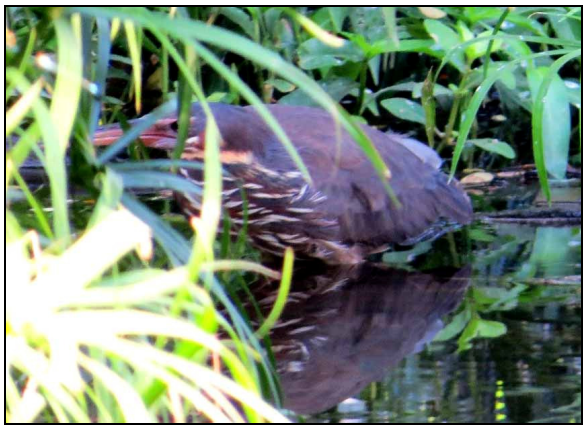
Common Kingfisher pair (Photo: Humayun Taher)

A bridge over the moat of one of the enclosures had been appropriated by a pair of Small Blue Kingfishers (*Alcedo atthis*). Sitting back to back on either end of the bridge, they made a very quaint picture and when we looked closely we were able to ascertain the male and female from the difference in the colour of the beak. It is not often that we get such a good sighting of the pair together, so several members were most interested to not only learn about but also to be able to clearly see this difference in bill colour. I wish more birds could be equally accommodating…

Black-crowned Night Heron (Photo: Eva Veroeveren)

Continuing along, we came to the where there are some interesting reed-beds. The trees sticking up from these reeds are roosting spots for the Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and we saw a few.

Just then, a dark-plumaged bird flushed from the reeds and plopped down on the edge of a small bit of open water. I first thought it was a juvenile Night Heron, but a quick look through the binoculars showed that it was actually the Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*). The bird was standing just inside the reeds and was difficult to spot but most of us managed to get a very good look at it. Black Bitterns are seen quite regularly at the Zoo, usually on the large lake but this habitat seems even more suitable, given the extent of growth of the reeds here. We should remember this when we visit the Zoo again.



Black Bittern (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Rufous Treepie (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Having finished exclaiming over the bittern we proceeded further, being serenaded by Rufous Treepies (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) and Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*). Near the tiger enclosures we heard and saw the little Tickell's Blue Flycatchers (*Cyornis tickelliae*) which are always to be seen in this area.

White-headed Babbler (Photo: Eva Veroeveren)

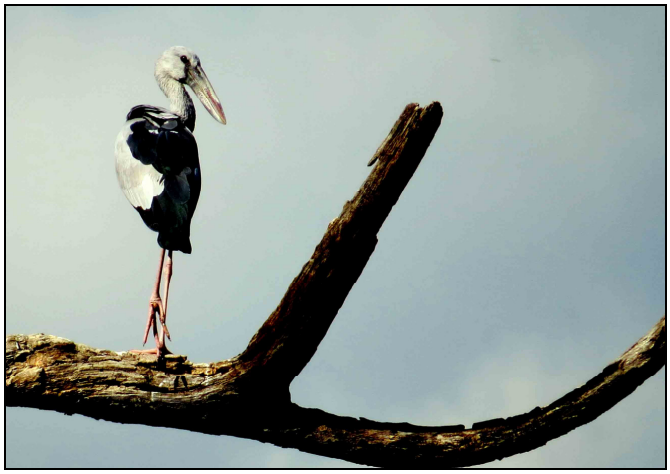
Also seen were the White-headed (or Yellow-billed) Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*). These last, put on a wonderful display of communal eating by partaking of a dead snake. Hemant got some excellent pictures of the convivial party at breakfast. I read up on this and learnt that Babblers are known to gang up against predators and frequently kill small snakes, but I couldn't find any reference to the birds actually eating the snake so killed. Perhaps scarcity of food may have tempted the birds to turn hunter.

A little further away we came across another hunter busy eating something. The position in which the bird was sitting did not allow us to see what it was eating, but we saw a bit of down stuck just below the eye so it is probable that the Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) was finishing off a bird. This Shikra became one of the most photographed birds of this entire trip. Every camera was on it and, because it was busy eating, it seemed to have not noticed the many clicks and pings that were coming from the assembled ranks of cameramen.

Shikra (Photo: Humayun Taher)

It is not often that this secretive hawk is seen sitting in so open a position, so we are all able to observe it to our heart's content. The yellow eye proclaimed that the bird was a young one or a female, but the presence of the unbarred white thighs showed it to be a male, so it was probably a three-year old male (adult males have red eyes, grey-brown plumage and unbarred tail). Having finished what it was eating, the bird appeared to notice the crowd for the first time and rapidly retreated into dense shrubbery while we continued further, our present objective being the large Zoo Lake.

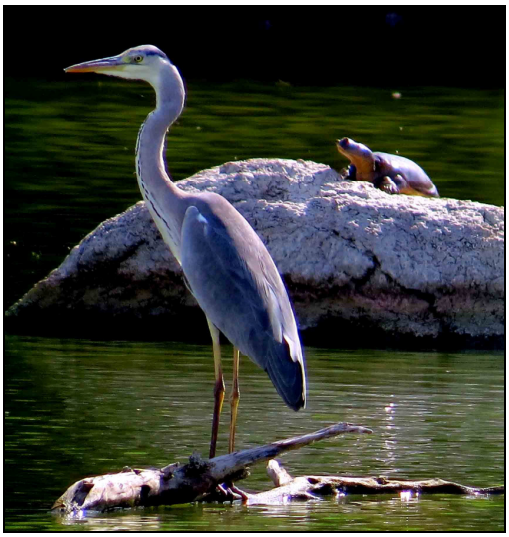
Oriental Magpie Robins (*Copsychus saularis*) and Indian Robins (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) hopped around near the Gaur enclosure. This area seems to be to the liking of these two species and we frequently encounter them here. Also seen was another Shikra sitting quietly in a thinly foliaged tree.



Asian Openbill (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

Soon after, we reached the lake and started to scan the area. Foremost interesting sighting was of the nesting Large Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). The colony on this lake seemed to be doing quite well; but I was very sad to see that the Painted Storks had disappeared. Even the tree on which they nested had gone. Maybe it fell down and so the birds deserted the place.

While looking for the Storks, we saw a little Cinnamon Bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamoneus*) flying past. It landed in a dense reed-bed where it was quite invisible, much to our disappointment. But to make up, we spotted a small flotilla of Indian Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) on the lake and, stretched out on a large rock just under the Cormorant nesting trees was a small Mugger Crocodile. It probably selected the place on purpose, to be able to scavenge off the cormorants. A dropped fish or a weak nestling would be uncommonly handy for a hungry croc, I think.



Grey Heron (Photo: Nupur Sengupta)

While developing this theory, we rather lost track of our surroundings until, suddenly, there was a commotion in the bird-life. The flying Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) started screaming loudly and the incubating Cormorants raised their heads and added their own voices to the general cacophony. And that's when we noticed the huge raptor that was the object of attention for the kites. About 20-odd kites immediately started mobbing this big bird. We first thought it was a Short-toed Eagle until the very distinctive light scapulars and the underwing pattern confirmed the identity of the Bonelli's Eagle (*Aquila fasciata*).

Bonelli's Eagle (Photo: Eva Veroeveren)

This was a great sighting and I think a new record for the Zoo, unless I am wrong. Equally interesting was the mobbing the bird was being subjected to by the kites. I can understand the cormorants being worried but why kites, I wonder. Would be interesting to learn what could be the reason for this. My book tells me that eagles are often hounded and mobbed by crows and mynas and sometimes parakeets, but no mention is made of mobbing by kites. Interesting observation, this!

Time was getting on now and the Zoo Asst. Curator, who had breakfast waiting for us at the Zoo office wanted to know how we were getting on. The first of the visitors also started trickling in. Once the crowds arrived, there was little scope to continue birding.

Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Humayun Taher)

So, once more herding the group together, we rapidly trooped back to the Zoo office to tuck into a most welcome breakfast, washed down with the ever-refreshing hot *chai*. After group pictures and some story-telling, some of us elected to stay back and do animal-watching in the zoo while the rest headed home.

A wonderful trip indeed and the final list came out to 67 species, with the highlights of course, being the noble Bonelli's Eagle and the Indian Shikra.

The full list of species sighted is given below:

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
1	R	Little Cormorant	Phalacrocorax niger	
2	R	Large Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	
3	R	Oriental Darter	Anhinga melanogaster	NT
4	R	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	
5	R	Great Egret	Egretta alba	
6	R	Intermediate Egret	Egretta intermedia	
7	R	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	
8	R	Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea	
9	R	Eastern Cattle Egret	Bubulcus coromandus	
10	R	Indian Pond Heron	Ardeola grayii	
11	R	Black-crowned Night Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax	
12	R	Chestnut Bittern	Ixobrychus cinnamomeus	
13	R	Black Bittern	Ixobrychus flavicollis	
14	R	Asian Openbill	Anastomus oscitans	
15	R	Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus	
16	R	Black-headed Ibis	Threskiornis melanocephalus	NT
17	R	Indian Spot-billed Duck	Anas poecilorhyncha	
18	R	Black Kite	Milvus migrans	
19	M	Black-eared Kite	Milvus lineatus	
20	R	Indian Shikra	Accipiter badius	
21	R	Bonelli's Eagle	Hieraaetus fasciatus fasciatus	
22	R	Grey Francolin	Francolinus pondicerianus	
23	R	Indian Peafowl	Pavo cristatus	
24	R	White-breasted Waterhen	Amaurornis phoenicurus	
25	R	Bronze-winged Jacana	Metopidius indicus	
26	R	Red-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus	
27	R	Rock Dove	Columba livia intermedia	
28	R	Laughing Dove	Streptopelia senegalensis	
29	R	Spotted Dove	Streptopelia chinensis	
30	R	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri	
31	R	Plum-headed Parakeet	Psittacula cyanocephala	
32	R	Southern Coucal	Centropus sinensis	
33	M	Jacobin Cuckoo	Clamator jacobinus	
34	R	Asian Koel	Eudynamys scolopacea	
35	R	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	Cacomantis passerinus	
36	R	Spotted Owlet	Athene brama	
37	R	Asian Palm-swift	Cypsiurus balasiensis	
38	R	Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis	
39	R	White-breasted Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis	
40	R	Indian Roller	Coracias benghalensis	
41	R	Common Hoopoe	Upupa epops	
42	R	Indian Grey Hornbill	Tockus birostris	

	Status	Species	Scientific name	IUCN Status
43	R	Coppersmith Barbet	Megalaima haemacephala	
44	R	Black-rumped Flameback	Dinopium benghalense	
45	R	Dusky Crag-martin	Ptyonoprogne concolor	
46	R	White-browed Wagtail	Motacilla maderaspatensis	
47	R	Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer	
48	R	White-browed Bulbul	Pycnonotus luteolus	
49	R	Common Iora	Aegithina tiphia	
50	R	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Cyornis tickelliae	
51	R	Oriental Magpie Robin	Copsychus saularis	
52	R	Indian Black Robin	Saxicoloides fulicatus fulicatus	
53	R	Yellow-billed Babbler	Turdoides affinis	
54	R	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis	
55	R	Ashy Prinia	Prinia socialis	
56	R	Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius	
57	R	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	Dicaeum erythrorhynchos	
58	R	Purple-rumped Sunbird	Leptocoma zeylonica	
59	R	Purple Sunbird	Cinnyris asiaticus	
60	R	Indian Silverbill	Euodice malabarica	
61	R	Brahminy Starling	Temenuchus pagodarum	
62	R	Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis	
63	R	Indian Golden Oriole	Oriolus kundoo	
64	R	Black Drongo	Dicrurus macrocercus	
65	R	Rufous Treepie	Dendrocitta vagabunda	
66	R	House Crow	Corvus splendens	
67	R	Indian Jungle Crow	Corvus culminatus	

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NESTING OF PIGEONS (ROCK DOVES)

Text and photo: Ayesha Emaan Taher (age 13)

Rock Doves (*Columba livia*) are the common Blue Rock (Feral) Pigeons that are seen in large numbers all around our houses and apartments. This year, a pair had made a nest just in front of our apartment balcony and I was able to see how they nested and their habits. The nests of these birds can be found along building ledges, rafters, beams and under bridges or inside barns.

The nest is saucer-like in shape and made of sticks, stems and leaves.

The nesting habits of these pigeons are a bit unique. The male chooses a site in view of the female, selects a stick and bringing it back, lays it in front of his mate. The female, who stays at the nesting site, accepts the sticks the male brings to her and places them underneath her.

The female may sit on the nest a day or two before the first egg is laid. Generally 2 white eggs are laid. Both the male and the female will incubate the eggs, although only the female does the incubation during the night.

Incubation lasts for about 18 days and the young will leave the nest in 25 to 29 days after hatching.

Initially the young are fed 'milk' (which is seeds that the adult eats, ground up inside the bird and mixed with water and saliva, which the adult then feeds to the chicks). Over a 10 day period, the young are fed increasing amounts of solid food such as caterpillars and insects.

During nest building, the female sits on the nest and makes a flimsy platform of straw, stems and sticks from materials brought to her one at a time by the male.

Pigeons re-use their nests many times, and they don't carry away the faeces of their nestlings the way many birds do. So the nest gets quite dirty after some days. This also means that over time, the lightweight nest grows into a steady pat-like mound, sometimes incorporating unhatched eggs and the remains of dead nestlings.

The newly hatched baby has pale yellow down and a flesh-coloured bill with a dark band.

A very important point is that these pigeons don't migrate.

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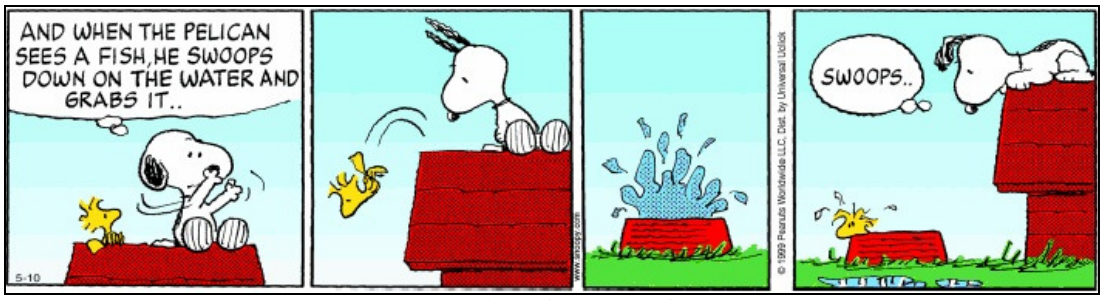
Bird Humour


AND WHEN THE PELICAN SEES A FISH, HE SWOOPS DOWN ON THE WATER AND GRABS IT..
SWOOPS..
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(From Bombay Times, 20-06-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)

Black Drongo Adult (L) and Juvenile (R)
(Sainikpuri, 01-08-2010 and Manjeera, 28-11-2010)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Dicruridae
Genus: *Dicrurus*
Species: *D. macrocercus*
Size: 27-29 cm

Description &distribution: The Black Drongo is a small passerine member of the Dicruridae family of drongos. A glossy black bird, it has a distinctive, wide-forked tail and a diagnostic white rictal spot at the base of the gape. The dark brown irises are also diagnostic, serving to differentiate the Black Drongo from the Ashy Drongo (which has crimson irises). The legs are short. The sexes are alike, but the juveniles are brownish. First-year birds may show some white on belly and vent, while in second-year birds, the white is restricted to the vent.

A common resident breeder across its range encompassing most parts of Asia, seven sub-species of the Black Drongo have been recognised: the nominate *D. macrocercus* of peninsular India; *D. m. albirictus* of northern India (which is larger); *D. m. minor* of Sri Lanka (which is smaller); *D. m. cathoecus* of Thailand, Hong Kong and China (whose dark wings have a greenish gloss and which has a much smaller rictal spot); *D. m. thai*, resident in southern Siam; *D. m. javanus* of Bali and Java; and *D. m. harterti* of Taiwan and Formosa (which has tail length less than the wings).

Behaviour: Very territorial, aggressive and fearless, the Black Drongo will readily attack bigger birds like crows or even birds of prey, especially if they enter the Drongo's nesting area. Usually seen in ones and twos, the Black Drongo is seen mostly in open country, perching upright close to the ground on thorny bushes, bare tree perches, or even electricity wires. They are also often seen perching on grazing animals, with whom they have a synergistic relationship - they feed on the insects stirred up by the grazing animals, while also preventing such insects away from the animals. Flight is fast with strong wing-flaps and high maneuverability, enabling the Black Drongo to capture insects in flight. It is very active at dawn and dusk.

Photo: Humayun Taher

It is known to associate with birds like Common Myna or Cattle Egret, with whom it shares similar diet and habitat. It is sometimes seen in small congregations in fields that are being ploughed, burning grasslands, etc where large groups of insects may be disturbed. It has a wide range of calls, but the commonest is a two-note *'tee hee'*. It is also known to use false alarm calls, like for instance, that of the Shikra, to scare away Common Mynas and steal their prey. The diet mainly consists of grasshoppers, cicadas, termites, bees, wasps, ants, moths, dragonflies and beetles, though it may also take caterpillars, grubs, or small reptiles. There are also some records of the Black Drongo preying on small birds, bats, fish, scorpions, centipedes, etc.

Play behaviour has been observed, dropping a leaf and catching it in mid-air, possibly to train young birds and help them acquire aerobatic skills.

Nesting: The Black Drongo breeds mainly in February-March in southern India, and till August in other parts. The birds pair for the whole season, with both sexes singing in the mornings during the breeding season.

Courtship displays may be elaborate, and often includes aerobatic chases during which they sometimes lock wings and beaks together, sometimes even falling to the ground while thus engaged. The nest is built by both partners, and is a small cup of a thin layer of sticks laid in a cleft or fork of branches, preferably in large leafy trees like Jackfruit. The Black Drongo is extremely aggressive towards predators near its nest, mobbing or dive-bombing even large birds like eagles; so much so that many other birds, like bulbuls, doves, pigeons, orioles and babblers build their nests nearby to take advantage of this behavior. The typical clutch of the Black Drongo consists of three or, rarely, four eggs, pale cream to red in colour, and having various spots and markings. The parents may raise a second brood in the same season if the first one is lost for any reason.

Local name: The Black Drongo is known as *'kotwal'* ('policeman') or *'bhujanga'* in Hindi, *'passala poli gadu'* or *'nalla aitrinta'* in Telugu, *'erattai vaalan kuruvi'* ('two-tailed bird') or *'kari kuruvi'* (charcoal bird) in Tamil, *'kakka tampuratti'* ('queen of crows') in Malayalam and *'bharat angark'* in Sanskrit.

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